PRESCHOOL TEACHER’ USE OF STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE IN YOUNG CHILDREN: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

S. Rakap¹, S. Rakap², S. Kalkan²

¹ Dumlupinar Primary School (TURKEY)
² Ondokuz Mayis University (TURKEY)

Abstract

Social-emotional competence has been recognized as a key factor for children’s early school adjustment and readiness (Fox et al., 2011). Research has shown that prevention of challenging behavior and promotion of social-emotional competence in early childhood are ongoing challenges for families and early childhood educators in the United States (Kaiser et al., 2002) and other countries (e.g., Erbas et al., 2010; Heo et al., 2014). There is growing research evidence highlighting the importance of practitioners’ use of promotion, prevention, and intervention practices to support children’s social-emotional competence (Fox et al., 2011). However, results of several descriptive studies showed that practitioners of early years are not appropriately prepared to support social-emotional competence of young children (Hemmeter et al., 2006; 2008).

In Turkey, the number of young children identified with emotional and behavioral problems has increased over the last decade (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2014). However, preschool teachers’ perceptions and use of strategies to support young children’s social-emotional competence is unknown.

The purpose of this study was to examine Turkish preschool teachers' perceptions and use of strategies to support young children’s social-emotional competence. Two main research questions were addressed in the present study:
(a) Which social-emotional teaching strategies do Turkish preschool teachers perceive as important to use?
(b) How prepared do Turkish preschool teachers feel to use social-emotional teaching strategies?
(c) Which social-emotional teaching strategies do Turkish preschool teachers use?

A descriptive research design will be used to investigate Turkish preschool teachers’ perceptions and use of strategies to support young children’s social-emotional competence. Upon teachers’ agreement to participate in the present study, two researchers conducted observations in each of the 60 classrooms during ongoing classroom activities using the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool for Preschool Classrooms (TPOT; Hemmeter, Fox, & Snyder, 2014) to determine preschool teachers’ use of social-emotional teaching strategies. Each teacher was given a researcher-developed questionnaire asking them to rate each social-emotional teaching strategy included in TPOT based on three questions: (a) How important is it to use this strategy in your classroom?, (b) How prepared do you feel to use this strategy in your classroom?, and (c) How often do you use this strategy in your classroom?

Results of the present study showed that Turkish preschool teachers believe that social-emotional teaching strategies included in TPOT are very important to use in order to promote social-emotional development and to address challenging behaviors of young children. However, teacher reports and observations indicated minimal use of many strategies included in TPOT. Moreover, teachers reported that they feel unprepared to use many strategies included in TPOT.

Early childhood teacher preparation programs have to place a greater emphasis on how to support social-emotional competence in young children and how to address their challenging behaviors. Moreover, professional development programs should be prepared to support in-service teachers, use of social-emotional teaching strategies.

Keywords: Preschool, young children, social-emotional development, Teaching Pyramid.